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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 000536

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2018
TAGS: [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [SN](#) [BM](#) [ASEAN](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA CYCLONE: NO RELIEF ACCESS LIKELY BEFORE REFERENDUM, SINGAPORE MFA TELLS AMBASSADOR MARCIEL

Classified By: CDA Daniel Shields, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: U.S. Ambassador to ASEAN Scot Marciel told Singapore MFA Permanent Secretary Bilahari Kausikan May 9 that the USG is focused on humanitarian concerns in Burma, specifically on ensuring that sufficient international assistance quickly reaches those affected by Cyclone Nargis. Kausikan said Singapore would allow the United States to stage relief efforts from facilities in Singapore if we wished. He said Singapore had delivered relief supplies to Burma but was still waiting for GOB acceptance of Singapore's offer of engineering and medical teams. Until Singapore's own request was addressed, the GOS could not weigh in with the regime on the U.S. behalf. Kausikan predicted the GOB would not facilitate international access until after its May 10 constitutional referendum at the soonest. He warmly welcomed Marciel's appointment, but urged that the Secretary attend the July ASEAN Regional Forum Ministerial to ensure that ASEAN sentiment remained positive. END SUMMARY

BURMA CYCLONE RELIEF

¶12. (C) U.S. Ambassador to ASEAN and East Asian and Pacific Affairs Bureau Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel, accompanied by the Charge, told MFA Permanent Secretary Bilahari Kausikan May 9 that the President and entire USG are determined to help those affected by Cyclone Nargis and are fully focused on humanitarian rather than political concerns. He said the USG stands ready to provide \$3.25 million in humanitarian assistance and has offered help through military channels also. Like other donors, however, we are still waiting for the regime to accept the assistance offered and provide visas for our relief personnel. Ambassador Marciel urged Singapore to press Burma to allow international aid to flow and stressed that we want to work with Singapore to get assistance to those who need it in Burma.

¶13. (C) Kausikan said he believed the USG when it says it is fully focused on humanitarian objectives, but the Burmese regime remained skeptical about U.S. intentions. He added that the generals' reluctance to accept U.S. assistance was "reprehensible, but comprehensible" given the "different voices coming out of Washington," the perceived hostility of the United States, and regime's paranoid nature. Kausikan said Singapore and others had been able to deliver supplies to Burma, but that a Singapore offer of "assets," including a civil defense relief team and a medical team, was still awaiting GOB approval. He offered the United States access to Singapore military facilities to stage our relief effort, but said the GOS could not weigh in with the GOB on the U.S.

behalf for the time being because doing so could decrease prospects that the regime would approve Singapore's own request to provide assistance.

¶4. (C) Kausikan added that Singapore FM Yeo had offered Burma to host an informal meeting under ASEAN auspices to help coordinate international relief but had not yet had a response. Meanwhile, Singapore supported issuing a chairman's statement from the ongoing ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Senior Officials Meeting on the need for all parties to support a large-scale relief effort in Burma.

¶5. (C) Kausikan harshly blamed French FM Kouchner for "screwing up" efforts to persuade Burma to allow assistance with comments threatening UN Security Council responsibility-to-protect action that only increased the regime's paranoia. He predicted the regime would continue to restrict access at least until after it holds its constitutional referendum on May 10. Noting that Senior General Than Shwe remains isolated and indifferent and that many soldiers come from rural areas such as those affected by the cyclone, Kausikan suggested that the Burmese military could face increasing dissention in its ranks. Ambassador Marciel reiterated that USG's current focus is on the humanitarian response. He said there is a longer term need for fresh thinking on how to bring about political change in Burma and that he looked forward to discussing the issue with Kausikan and others in the region in the future.

ASEAN WELCOMES AMBASSADORIAL APPOINTMENT

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¶6. (C) Kausikan warmly welcomed Marciel's recent confirmation as the first ambassador from any country to ASEAN. He noted that the GOS had just approved the appointment of its own first Permanent Representative to ASEAN and that other ASEAN members would likely follow suit. Kausikan recalled that ASEAN members had welcomed the idea of a U.S. ambassador, but that the idea had aroused suspicions that the United States might in effect be downgrading its representation at ASEAN-related meetings. He urged that Secretary Rice attend the ARF Ministerial meeting in July to prevent Marciel's appointment, a "good thing," from being seen as "a bad thing."

NORTH KOREA VISIT

¶7. (C) Kausikan mentioned his plans to visit North Korea with FM Yeo in the days ahead. Singapore and North Korea have had diplomatic relations for some time now and the North Koreans, with the exception of some proliferation activities, have generally been well-behaved in Singapore. They have recently started to send delegations to Singapore focused on serious economic issues such as port management. In this context, FM Yeo and Kausikan are going to North Korea to assess whether there is any serious prospect for economic reform there, despite the continued "theological" political system in the DPRK that demands absolute belief.

¶8. (C) Kausikan said the Chinese are telling him they believe Kim Jong-Il has gradually shifted in the course of various visits to China over the years from a position of opposing economic reforms, to being neutral, to supporting reforms. Kausikan said the North Koreans seem particularly interested these days in Vietnam's economic reform successes. He mentioned that Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gye Gwan, whom Kausikan hosted for a dinner when Kim visited Singapore for nuclear talks with A/S Hill, will reciprocate by hosting a dinner for Kausikan in Pyongyang.

¶9. (U) Ambassador Marciel cleared this message.

http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eap/singapore/ind_ex.cfm
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